Sharing an Early Life Challenge and Unmet Childhood Need

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Our early experiences with our caretakers shapes the behavior and quality of our relationships in the present.

This exercise will help you discover the early relational challenge you experienced that determines the frustrations and desires you experience as you interact with significant others in the present.

Study the ten items in the two boxes below. **Select and CIRCLE the ONE (and only ONE) that most represents your greatest early challenge.**

If none of them describe your early challenge, write one that does in the box marked “other.”

### MY EARLY CHALLENGE

When the major caretaker was...

**INTRUSIVE**

I Wanted:

- To get free from feeling controlled by others.
- To express my own thoughts rather than what I should think.
- To express what I felt rather than what I should feel.
- To experience my thoughts and feelings as important.
- To do what I wanted to do rather than what I ought to.

**NEGLECTFUL**

I Wanted:

- To experience feeling seen and valued rather than invisible.
- To be approached by others rather than feel alone/abandoned.
- To feel significant as a person.
- To get support for what I think or feel.
- To get someone interested in what I want and like.

**OTHER**

__________________________________________
__________________________________________
__________________________________________
__________________________________________
__________________________________________
The early relational challenge you identified on the previous page resulted in a relational need that you brought into your adult relationships. It is especially present in your adult intimate relationships and it also shows up in all your significant relationships.

Study the ten items in the two boxes below. Select and CIRCLE the ONE (and only ONE) that best describes what you needed most from significant people in your early life.

If none of them describe your early relational need, write one that does in the box marked "other."

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<tr>
<th>MY EARLY RELATIONAL NEED</th>
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<td><strong>INTRUSIVE</strong></td>
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<td>I Needed:</td>
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<td>• To have space and time to myself on a regular basis.</td>
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<td>• To experience trust from others of my thinking and my decisions.</td>
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<td>• To be asked what I feel and what I want.</td>
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<td>• To experience genuine and reliable warmth when I need it.</td>
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<td>• To experience that what I do and want is valued by others.</td>
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IMAGO DIALOGUE
EARLY RELATIONAL CHALLENGE AND NEED

MAKING AN APPOINTMENT
Sender: I would like to talk about my early relational challenges and the needs I brought to my adult relationships. Is now a good time?
Receiver: Yes, I’m available now.

CONNECTING NON-VERBALLY
Makes eye contact and takes three deep breaths in sync.

SHARING AN APPRECIATION
Sender: Before I start, I would like to share something I appreciate about you which is…
Receiver: Let me see if I got it. You want to express an appreciation of me which is…… Did I get it?

SHARING YOUR EARLY CHALLENGE
Sender: When I was a child, I lived with caretakers who were generally Neglectful or Intrusive (CIRCLE ONE) and my relational challenge with them was to ______________________(challenge you circled on previous page).

MIRRORING THE EARLY CHALLENGE
Receiver: Mirrors and checks for accuracy: Let me see if I’ve got it. You said when you were a child, you lived with caretakers who were ______________and your challenge with them was to_________. Did I get it?
Sender: Yes, you got it (or, “You got most of it. I also said….”)
**SHARING THE EARLY RELATIONAL NEED**

Sender: And when I feel _______, I think that what I needed most from them was-____________________________ (item circled on MY EARLY RELATIONAL NEED page).

Not getting that from them, I brought it to my adult relationships.

**MIRRORING EARLY RELATIONSHIP NEED**

Receiver: Mirrors: Let me see if I’ve got it. What you needed most from your caretakers was________________________. Not getting that from them, you brought____________________________ to your adult relationships.

Checks for accuracy: Did I get it?

Sender: Yes, you got it (or, “Yes, and I also said ….”).

Receiver: Continues mirroring, checking for accuracy until the Sender says, “You got it.”

Shows curiosity and asks: Is there more about that?

Mirrors and checks for accuracy until the Sender says, “There is no more about that.”
SUMMARIZING

Receiver: Let me see if I got all of that. In summary, your caretakers were generally ____________ and the relational challenge you had with them was to _________________.
When you remember that, you feel ________________.
And then you think that what you needed from them was ________, and not getting it from them, you brought ________________ to your adult relationships.
Checks for accuracy: Did I get it all?

Sender: *Listens to the summary and verifies if accurate.*
Yes, you got me. -Or- The part you got was … and I also said…

VALIDATING

Receiver: *Validates:* You make sense, and what makes sense is that if your caretakers were ________________, that your challenge would have been ________________ and that your relationship need would be ________________. It also makes sense that not getting that in your early years, you would bring it to your adult relationships.
Is that an accurate validation?

Sender: *Receives the validation and verifies if accurate.*

EMPATHIZING

Receiver: *Expresses empathy:* And given that, I can imagine that if your relationship need to ________________ was met in your adult relationships, you would feel _____________(glad, relieved, happy, connected, heard, etc.)
Is that your feeling?
Are there other feelings?

Sender: Yes (or, I also feel ....)
CLOSING DECLARATIONS

Receiver: Thank you for sharing with me your early relational challenge and need and how you would feel if that need was met in your adult relationships.

Sender: Thank you for listening.

If you are intimate partners, give each other a one-minute hug and make eye contact on release.

If your dialogue partner is a friend or acquaintance, make physical contact that is comfortable and appropriate for both of you.

SWITCHING ROLES

When all the steps are completed, switch roles and repeat the process.